White-Bear-King-Valemon
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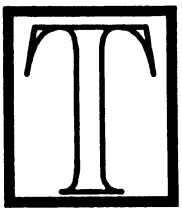
WHITE-BEAR-KING-VALEMON

From *Norwegian Folktales*, as collected by
Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe
Translation by Pat Shaw and Carl Norman
Oslo: Dreyer Forlag, 1960



here was once, as well could be, a king. He had two daughters who were mean and ugly, but the third was as fair and sweet as the bright day, and the king and all were fond of her. She once dreamed about a golden wreath, which was so lovely that she couldn't live unless she got it. But as she couldn't get it, she began to pine and could not speak for sorrow. And when the king found out it was the wreath she was grieving for, he had one made almost like the one the princess had dreamed of, and sent it out to goldsmiths in every land and asked them to make one like it. They worked both day and night, but some of the wreaths she threw away, and others she wouldn't even look at. Then one day, when she was in the forest, she caught sight of a white bear, which had the wreath she had dreamed of between its paws and was playing with it. And she wanted to buy it.

No! It wasn't to be had for money, but only in return for herself. Well, life wasn't worth living without it, she said; it didn't matter where she went or who she got, if only she got the wreath. And so they agreed that he was to fetch her in three days' time, and that would be a Thursday.

When she came home with the wreath, everyone was glad because she was happy again, and the king felt sure that it would be a simple matter to keep a white bear at bay. On the third day, the whole army was posted round the castle to deal with him. But when the white bear came, there was no one who could hold his ground against him, for no weapon could make any effect on him. He knocked them down right and left until they were lying in heaps. This, thought the king, was proving downright disastrous; so he sent out his eldest daughter, and the white bear took her on his back and rushed off with her.

When they had travelled far, and farther than far, the white bear asked, "Have you ever sat softer, have you ever seen clearer?"

"Yes, on my mother's lap I sat softer, in my father's court I saw clearer," she said.

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"Well, you're not the right one then," said the white bear, and chased her home again.

The next Thursday he came again, and did just as he had done before. The army was out with orders to deal with the white bear. But neither iron nor steel bit on him, so he mowed them down like grass until the king had to ask him to stop. And then he sent out his next eldest daughter, and the white bear took her up on his back and rushed off with her.

When they had travelled far, and farther than far, the white bear asked, "Have you ever sat softer, have you ever seen clearer?"

"Yes," she said, "in my father's court I saw clearer, on my mother's lap I sat softer."

"Well, you're not the right one then," said the white bear, and chased her home again.

On the third Thursday he came again. This time he fought even harder than before, until the king thought he couldn't let him knock down the whole army, and so he gave him his third daughter. Then he took her on his back and travelled away, far, and farther than far, and when they reached the forest, he asked her, as he had asked the others, if she had ever sat softer and seen clearer.

"*No, never*!" she said.

"Well, *you're* the right one," he said.

So they came to a castle which was so fine that the castle her father lived in was like the meanest cottage in comparison. There she was to stay, and live well, and she was to have nothing else to do but see to it that the fire never went out. The bear was away during the day, but at night he was with her, and then he was a man. For three years all went as well as could be. But each year she had a child, which he took and rushed away with as soon as it had come into the world. So she became more and more downcast, and asked if she couldn't be allowed to go home and see her parents. Yes, there was no objection to that; but first she must promise that she would listen to what her father *said*, but not to what her mother wanted her to *do*. So she went home, and when they were alone with her, and she had told them how she was getting on, her mother wanted to give her a candle to take with her so she could see what the bear was like when he turned into a man at night. But her father said no, she shouldn't do that. "It will only do more harm than good."

But no matter how it was or was not, she took the candle stub with her when she left. The first thing she did, when he had fallen asleep, was to light it and shine it on him. He was so handsome that she thought she could never gaze her fill at him; but, as she shone the light, a drop of hot tallow dripped onto his forehead and so he awoke.

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"What have you done?" he said. "Now you have brought misfortune on us both. There was no more than a month left; if you had only held out I would have been freed, for a Troll-hag has bewitched me, so that I'm a white bear during the day. But now it's over with us. Now I have to go there and take her."

She cried and carried on, but he had to go and go he would. So she asked if she could go with him. That was out of the question, he said, but when he rushed off in his bearskin, she seized hold of the fur all the same, flung herself up on his back, and held on fast. Then they were off over mountain and hill, through grove and thicket, until her clothes were torn off, and she was so dead tired that she let go her hold, and knew no more. When she awoke, she was in a great forest, and so she set out on her way again, but she didn't know where her path led. At last she came to a cottage where there were two womenfolk, an old crone and a pretty little girl.

The king's daughter asked if they had seen anything of White-Bear-King-Valemon.

"Yes, he rushed by here early today, but he was going so fast that you won't catch up with him again," they said.

The little girl scampered about, and clipped and played with a pair of golden scissors, which were such that pieces of silk and strips of velvet flew about her if she but clipped in the air. Wherever the scissors were, clothes were never lacking.

"But this poor woman, who has to journey so far and on such rough roads, she'll have to toil hard," said the little girl. "She has more need of these scissors than I, to cut clothes for herself," she said, and then she asked if she could give her the scissors. Yes, that she could.

So the king's daughter set off through the forest which never came to an end, all that day and night. And the next morning she came to another cottage. Here there were also two womenfolk, an old crone and a little girl.

"Good day," said the king's daughter. "Have you seen anything of White-Bear-King-Valemon?" she asked.

"Were you to have had him, maybe?" said the old woman.

That it was.

"Why, yes, he rushed by here yesterday, but he went so fast that you won't catch up with him," she said.

The little girl was playing about on the floor with a flask, which was such that it poured out whatever they wanted, and wherever the flask was, drink was never lacking.

"But this poor woman, who has to journey so far and on such rough roads, she'll be thirsty and suffer many other hardships," said the little girl, and then she asked if she could give her the flask. Why, yes, that she could.

So the king's daughter got the flask, said her thanks, and set out again, walking through the same forest, all that day and

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night. On the third morning she came to a cottage, and there were an old woman and a little girl.

"Good day," said the king's daughter.

"Good day to you," said the old woman.

"Have you seen anything of White-Bear-King-Valemon?" she said.

"Maybe you were to have had him?" said the old woman. Yes, that it was.

"Why, yes, he rushed past here yesterday evening; but he went so fast that you'll never catch up with him again," she said.

The little girl was playing on the floor with a cloth that was such that, whenever they said to it, "Cloth, spread thyself, and deck thyself with every good dish!" it did so. And wherever the cloth was, good food was never lacking.

"But this poor old woman, who has to journey so far and on such rough roads," said the little girl, "she may well both starve and suffer many other hardships, so she'll have more need of this cloth than I," she said, and then she asked if she could give her the cloth. That she could.

So the king's daughter took the cloth and said her thanks, and set off. Far, and farther than far, through the forest all that day and night she went. In the morning she came to a mountain spur which was as steep as a wall, and so high and so wide that no end could she see. There was a cottage there too, and, when she came in, the first thing she said was,

"Good day, have you seen whether White-Bear-King-Valemon has travelled this way?"

"Good day to you," said the old woman. "Maybe it was you who was to have had him?" she asked. That it was.

"Yes, he rushed up the mountain here three days ago; but nestlings can't get up there," she said.

This cottage was full of little children, and they all clung to their mother's apron-strings and cried for food. The old woman put a kettle full of pebbles on the fire. The king's daughter asked what was the good of that. They were so poor, said the old woman, that they could afford neither food nor clothes, and it was so hard to hear the children crying for a bite to eat. But when she put the kettle on the fire, and said, "Now the apples will soon be done," it seemed to deaden their hunger, and they were patient for a while. It wasn't long before the king's daughter got out the cloth and the flask, as you can imagine, and when the children were fed and happy, she clipped out clothing for them with the golden scissors.

"Well," said the old woman of the house, "Since you've been so heartily kind to me and my children, it would be a shame not to do what *we* can to try to help you up the mountain. My husband is really a master smith. Now you just rest until he

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comes back, and I'll get him to forge claws for your hands and feet, and then you can try to crawl up."

When the smith came, he started on the claws right away, and the next morning they were ready. She had no time to wait, but said her thanks, fastened the claws on her hands and crept and crawled up the mountainside the whole day and night, and, just when she was so tired that she didn't think she could lift her hand again, but felt she would sink to the ground, she got to the top. There was a plain, with fields and meadows so big and wide that she had never imagined anything so broad and so smooth, and close by there was a castle filled with workers of every kind, who toiled like ants in an anthill.

"What is going on here?" asked the king's daughter.

Well, this was where she lived, the Troll-hag who had bewitched White-Bear-King-Valemon, and in three days she was to wed him. The king's daughter asked if she could talk with her. No, not likely! That was out-and-out impossible. So she sat down outside the window, and started clipping with the golden scissors, and velvet and silken clothing flew about like a snowflurry. When the Toll-hag caught sight of that, she wanted to buy the scissors. "For no matter how the tailors toil, it's no use," she said, "there are too many to be clothed."

The scissors weren't for sale, said the king's daughter. But the Troll-hag could have them, if she would let her sleep with her sweetheart tonight. She could certainly do that, said the Troll-hag, but *she* would lull him to sleep herself, and wake him up herself. When he had gone to bed, she gave him a sleeping potion, so he was in no condition to wake up, for all the king's daughter shouted and cried.

The next day the king's daughter went outside the windows again, sat down and started pouring from the flask; it flowed like a brook, both beer and wine, and it never ran dry. When the Troll-hag laid eyes on that, she wanted to buy it; for "no matter how much they toil at the brewing and distilling, it's no use. There are too many to drink," she said. It wasn't for sale for money, said the king's daughter, but if she would let her sleep with her sweetheart tonight, she would give it to her. Yes, that she could certainly do, said the Troll-hag, but *she* would lull him to sleep herself, and wake him up herself. When he had gone to bed, she gave him a sleeping potion again, so the king's daughter had no better luck that night either. He couldn't be awakened, for all she cried and shouted. But that night one of the artisans was working in the room next door. He heard her crying in there, and he guessed what had really happened, and the next day he told the prince that *she* must have come, the king's daughter who was to have freed him.

The next day went just like the otherswith the cloth as with the scissors and the flask. When it was dinner time, the king's

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daughter went outside the castle, pulled out the cloth, and said, "Cloth, spread thyself and deck thyself with every good dish!" Then there was enough food for a hundred men, but the king's daughter sat down alone. When the Troll-hag caught sight of the cloth, she wanted to buy it, for "no matter how much they cook and bake, it's no use. There are too many mouths to feed," she said. It wasn't for sale for money, said the king's daughter, but if she would let her sleep with her sweetheart tonight, she could have it. She could certainly do that, said the Troll-hag, but *she* would lull him to sleep herself, and wake him up herself. When he had gone to bed, she came with a sleeping potion, but this time he was on his guard, and fooled her. The Troll-hag didn't trust him any more than just so far, she didn't, for she took a darning needle and stuck it right through his arm, to see if he were sleeping soundly enough. But no matter how much it hurt, he didn't move, and then the king's daughter was allowed to come in to him.

Now this was all very well, but they must get rid of the Troll-hag before he would be free. So he got the carpenters to make a trap-door on the bridge which the bridal procession was to cross, for it was the custom there that the bride should ride first in the procession. When the Troll-hag started across the bridge with all her Troll-hag bridesmaids, the planks under them dropped open and they fell through. Then King Valemon and the king's daughter and all the wedding guests rushed back to the castle, and took as much of the Troll-hag's gold and money as they could carry, and then rushed off to his country to hold the real wedding. But on the way, King Valemon stopped in and fetched the three little girls, and now she found out why he had taken the children from her—it was so that they could help her find him. So they caroused at the wedding both lustily and long.

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